

AMINTA
A
MODERN-LIFE DRAMA



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Hugh MacMahon

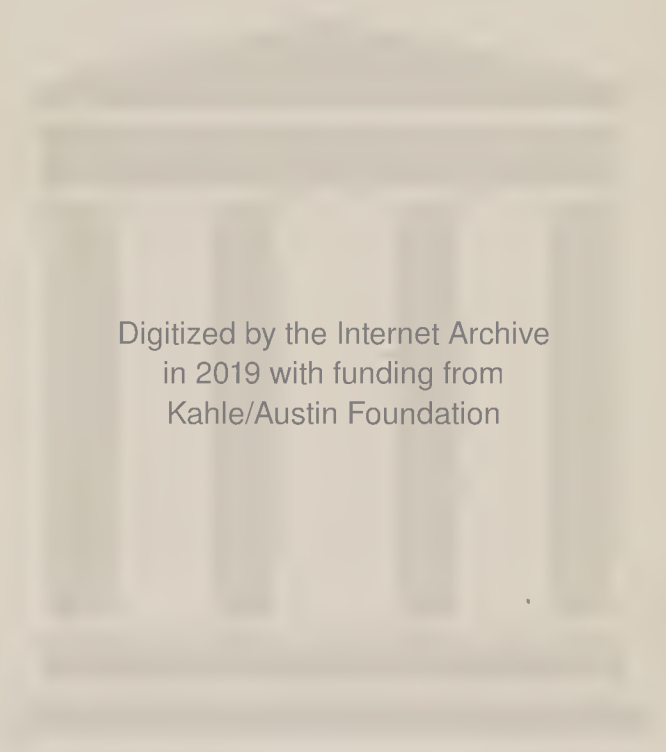
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AMINTA

A MODERN LIFE DRAMA

BY

CORNELIUS O'BRIEN, D. D.

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PREFACE.

POETRY is condensed thought rhythmically expressed. Only the cultured, as distinguished from the superficially educated, can enjoy and appreciate it. Hence this work is not intended for the light and thoughtless, but for those who, having received a liberal education, reflect at times on the unrest of modern intellects, and seek to learn something of its cause. We venture to hope that such as these will find that new ground in poetry has been broken. It is a very real modern life drama.

HALIFAX, N. S.

Feast of the Immaculate Conception.

252237

ST. CECILIA.

SONNET.

A SHELL lies silent on a lonely shore,
High rocks and barren stand with frowning
brow,
Hither no freighted ships e'er turn their prow
Their treasures on the fated sand to pour ;
Afar the white-robed sea gull loves to soar ;
But, pure as victim for a nation's vow
A lovely maiden strikes the shell, and now
Its music charms, and sadness reigns no more.
Thus Christian poesy, thus on pagan coasts,
For ages mute had lain thy sacred lyre,
Untouched since from the prophet's hand it fell,
Till fair Cecilia, taught by angel hosts,
Attuned its music to the heavenly choir,
And gave a Christian voice to Clio's shell.

BOOK I.

A M I N T A.

BOOK I.

I.

The music of our life is keyed

To moods that sweep athwart the soul ;

The strain will oft in gladness roll,

Or die in sobs and tears at need ;

But sad or gay, 'tis ever true

That, e'en as flowers from light take hue,

The key is of our mood the deed.

II.

Whence come our moods, or how go they?
Are they from automatic beats
Of brain-blood in its cellule seats,
With laws that fix their flight or stay?
Or do they form and substance take,
Like ripples on sad Nemi's lake,
Each from the one preceding's play?

III.

'Twere well, I ween, could man but solve
The complex problem of his life,
To see what share of joy or strife
His nature or his acts involve;
To see what are the primal facts
That ought to color all his acts,
And make his heart round them revolve.

IV.

Apollo's wing risks not such flight ;
Apollo's gifts can not reveal
The secrets hid beneath God's seal,
Or by the pristine fall from right ;
Bereft of guide, who these would teach,
A lampless pilgrim fain would reach
A shrine unknown on starless night.

V.

And so the world goes on in sighs,
Or in a laugh from sorrow born,
With naught of mirth, but much of scorn ;
Or giveth forth low, wailing cries
From weary hearts by grief oppressed,
That grasped at every promised rest,
But ever found each promise—lies.

VI.

Is there no key that can unlock
The inmost door of life and death?
Does life cease with the ceasing breath?
And do our hopes and fears but mock?
Are they not torments of the heart,
Engendered by vain priestly art,
Unnatural as grass to rock?

VII.

This simple tale will answer give
To questions often asked with pain
By those who seek the light in vain.
Our hero cried: "For truth I'll live;
Truth and myself the law I own;
Stern Science sits upon her throne
And sifts all creeds in her cold sieve."

A

VIII.

When running in her virgin pride,
Swift Atalanta, lured by sight
Of golden fruit, lost her prized right
To be of none the wedded bride ;
And so, by gaudy shams misled,
His morning hopes that truthward sped,
Ere eve, turned from the goal aside.

IX.

Beneath a towering cliff he stood ;
Beside him broke the wailing sea,
A heavy mist hung o'er the lea ;
The rising winds moaned in the wood
That girt, but not in full, the cape ;
And racing waves took on the shape
Of witches, with the foam for hood.

X.

A light of haste was in his eye,
A watching look was on his face,
Like sportsman waiting for the race;
He glanced not at the sea nor sky,
But only where a soft light shone
From palace perched on ridge of stone
That from the waves rose steep and high.

XI.

As gauzy cloud that floats between
The sleeping earth and rounded moon
No shadow casts on night in June,
But yet a change is felt or seen,
So, by a graceful form undimmed,
Or brighter, as a lamp fresh trimmed,
The palace light changed in its sheen.

XII.

Our hero saw the lightsome shade,
And leaped into a birchen skiff
That danced beneath the towering cliff.
He quickly rowed with feathered blade;
Beside the ridge of stone he went,
Long hours there he nightly spent,
As if his love were some fair Naiad.

XIII.

But no—she was of mortal form,
With eyes that spoke the soul's intent;
And o'er each fair lineament
A look, not cold, nor yet too warm—
A wistful calm it was—and yet
There flashed a shade of sad regret,
Wan as a moonbeam in a storm.

XIV.

Life's short aurora left her proud ;
Its morn had taught the vanity
Of beauty, wealth, or high degree,
To save her from an early shroud ;
And so her pride had given place
To sentiment that was not grace,
But still though passed, it left a cloud.

XV.

Hers was a soul that sought in art
An antidote to human ill ;
Old China, *bric-à-brac*—the skill
Æsthetic culture would impart
The beautiful on earth to find—
These were the objects of her mind ;
With these she strove to ease her heart.

XVI.

Vain hope ! As well with lambent air
Seek man's keen hunger to appease
As hearts to sate with such as these.
Love, yes, the beautiful and fair,
Nor cast on them a glance of scorn ;
But yet, take heed, thy soul was born
To higher things the child and heir.

XVII.

And thus Aminta passed her years ;
To outward seeming bright her lot.
But exile never yet forgot
The anguish of his parting tears ;
And souls when turned from God away,
That breathe his air but never pray,
Shall knowledge have of grief and fears.

XVIII.

Within the shadow of her lamp
The nightly signal to her love—
A crystal vase in form of dove,
And characters of mystic stamp
Cut on its wings—she eager raised ;
Inside the dove there gentle blazed
A light—safe beacon to Love's camp.

XIX.

In skiff beneath young Coroman,
For such his name, impatient stood ;
The rock is high, e'en if he would
To climb is not in power of man.
Aminta threw a tiny stone
Firm knit to tube of telephone,
And thus did art the distance span.

XX.

And backward thus from skiff to room
The olden words were spoke each night;
In truth it was a witching sight
And worthy of a brighter doom.
But one small thread, the woof of strife,
Too often mars the web of life
The Fates weave in their noiseless loom.

XXI.

How had they met? How sprung the tie
That like the goddess' fabled belt
No one forgets that once has felt?
Young Coroman beneath that sky
Saw not the light; a friend me told
The story of his life. Behold,
In his own words to tell I'll try.

.
Came Coroman to this fair shore

Where soft warm breezes mildly play
In valleys where the golden ore

In rich profusion scattered lay.
No hand in friendship grasped his own ;
No cheek beamed with a friendly smile ;
No voice, no look to him was known ;
No one spoke of his distant isle.

Alone, deserted, o'er the plain

In aimless course his footsteps tend ;
A demon passion stirs his brain
By one weak act his life to end.

At twilight's shadowy hour he goes

O'er Metiz' hills, whose deepening gloom
Offers an asylum of repose

As silent as the clammy tomb.

.

Beneath a mournful holly brake

He stretched his worn and wearied
form,

Lulled by the murmurings of a lake

That lay secure from breeze or storm.

An awful quiet hung in the air ;

The gloom was solemn, dark, and deep ;

A prey to grief and wild despair

Sank Coroman in troubled sleep ;

In fitful dreams before his eyes

Arose dark pictures of the past ;

They move his soul ; he vainly strives

To break the bonds around him cast.

A lovely woman first he sees,

Proud, hopeful, modest, fair, and mild,

Toying on her maternal knees

A bright, a rosy laughing child.

The vision changed ; a youth appeared
In flowery fields to gayly rove ;
His parents watched and inly feared
Some danger to their fluttering dove.
A murky cloud shuts out the sight ;
A horrid gloom is round him thrown ;
Wild terrors fill his soul with fright,
So painful has the darkness grown.
The cloud rolls off ; the youth appears ;
But ah ! so changed the once bright
look ;
The parents gazed with bitter tears
As if all hope their hearts forsook.
Dark shadows fill the path he treads ;
No star affords a cheering ray ;
Grim monsters raise their ghastly heads,
And folly's votaries point the way.

But now, e'en as this fades away,
New objects seem to slowly rise
In forms as fair as comes the day
To greet the land of cloudless skies.
A youthful pair with joyous song
Tripped lightly o'er the waving flowers
Awaking echoes far among
The linden trees and olive bowers.
Beneath an arbor now they stayed
Encircled by the sweet wild brier;
Close by a rippling fountain played,
Like distant sound of heavenly choir.
As in life's joyful hours dark woes
Steal o'er the sunshine of our rest,
E'en so, o'er visions fair as those
Fell shadows of a love unblest.

.

What mournful voice of wild despair

On that still night the echoes woke?

It was the hapless Elonair

Who thus in bitter accents spoke:

“Despised, abandoned, cast away

Like withered flower that graced a bride,

Culled for the pleasure of a day,

Then all unheeded, thrown aside—”

.

Again broke forth that plaintive tone,

But now subdued, and soft and low

As when the winds with saddest moan

O'er lonely graves the dead leaves throw.

“Here our vows of love were spoken

As night's still hours went gliding by;

Here those vows of love were broken,

And here deserted, I will die.

Forgive me, Heaven," she wildly said,
Then, kneeling on the dewy sod,
A moment gleamed the dagger's blade
And Elonair's soul met her God.
Though steeped in sleep, the awful sight
To Coroman's eyes brought the tears,
As dreaming fancy shed a light
On far off scenes of former years—
The infant on its mother's knee,
The man who broke his parents' hearts,
The youth, the lover—all were he;
"Oh! God," he cries and wildly starts.
As frightened deer flies from the hound
When resting near a cooling stream,
So Coroman springs from the ground,
Then shuddering cries: "'Twas but a
dream.

Yet if a dream why even now

 This unknown terror at my heart?

Why this cold dampness on my brow?

 This throbbing as if life would part?

O Elonair, the awful thought

 Of thy sad fate distracts my mind :

False vows, behold the crime you wrought ;

 Fierce are the stings you leave behind.

And thou pale star that saw my guilt,

 Be witness now to what I feel ;

My tears shall drop, like her blood spilt,

 Seeking pardon as here I kneel."

.
Fair is the scene on Metiz' hills ;

 The bright moon shines in softness there ;

A breezy warmth the spirit thrills

 As kneels young Coroman in prayer—

O Mercy, lend a ready ear,
A sinner now for pardon sues ;
Repentance surely is sincere
When sorrow cheeks with tears bedews.

.

He rose and gazed adown the vale,
Whence, soft as playing zephyr's sigh
Came to his ears, borne on the gale,
Strange blended notes of harmony.
He lightly goes, led by the sound,
O'er grassy hills and flowery glades ;
Where every object strewn around
Danced in the moonbeam's checkered shades.
A maid, fair as the summer's dawn,
And soft as balmy breath of spring,
Reclining on a heathered lawn,
Thus to herself did plaintive sing :

“Sweet are the tears of a new-born love ;

They are called the dew-drops of the heart ;
But sweeter still are the joys we prove

When two souls are linked by æsthetic art.
Love nerves the warrior’s faltering arm,

Where embittered foes meet on the plain ;
But art has a magic power to charm,

And soothe our grief for the hapless slain.
Asunder hearts may be rudely torn

By a cruel, material Fate ;
But back on gossamer wings is borne

The art-cultured soul to greet its mate.”

.

XXII.

Thus sang Aminta while she played,
And o'er her fell a mist of light
Showered through the leaves with dew-drops
dight,
That part the moon's effulgence stayed :
And yet these drops—tears spirits shed
When nightly mourning hopes long dead,
The thoughtless beams prismatic frayed.

XXIII.

Soul-filled, the youthful Coroman,
By chains of music sweetly bound,
Stands rooted to the herby ground :
Her form of face he fain would scan ;
But as she weaves her fetters strong,
A link in each note of the song,
How best to act he forms no plan.

XXIV.

Another watched Aminta then :

A swarthy face, with fell intent,

Hid by the copse in silence bent.

False to their trust, the well-paid men

Had left their mistress all alone ;

For traitor gold, a way was shown

To bear her to the outlaw's den !

XXV.

Gonzalez, once an honored name

Had proudly borne on Metiz' streets ;

Now in his soul each passion meets

A struggling sense against his shame ;

But canker vice, unchecked in youth,

Unmans his will, destroys his truth ;

He hugs the sin, yet fain would blame.

XXVI.

In happier days he sought the hand
Of fair Aminta, glad to feel
Her father wished to see him kneel
The favored suitor in the land.
She little loved his fickle ways,
His moods of wrath, his moods of praise,
So Hymen kindled not his brand.

XXVII.

An outlaw for a reckless deed,
One wild regret his spirit gnaws;
Like Satan in hell's gaping jaws,
He sees what might have been his meed;
But lost forever—ever lost!
To gain how slight had been the cost!
Yet his own act the loss decreed.

XXVIII.

Gonzalez ! weep we at thy lot—

Thy hopeless anguish knows no balm ;

For thee no more that blessed calm

That joys the soul where sin is not.

And yet the grace-fraught sacrament

That binds, or frees, by Christ's intent,

The rust of sin from souls can blot.

XXIX.

Gonzalez ! in our daily walk

How oft we meet thy fretted face !

It hides not in its damned disgrace,

But through the crowd doth haughty stalk.

Fair ladies smile, nor turn the head,

For o'er it hath not Science shed

A halo by its godless talk ?

XXX.

Meanwhile, unknown to each, they gaze

Upon the all-unconscious maid.

She ceases now ; the music played

Goes sounding on in endless maze ;

For wave-sounds started into life,

Like good or ill, like joy or strife,

Will echo through eternal days.

XXXI.

With timid step Gonzalez neared

The fair esthete, who now arose

And o'er her head a mantle throws :

Nor man nor demon he had feared ;

But love can make the strongest weak,

As love can nerve the frail and meek

To dare and die for one endeared.

XXXII.

Aminta heard the foot-falls press
The dewy grass with muffled sound ;
She deemed it was her faithful hound,
Who well her homeward hour could guess.
“Come, Oscar, come ; where are the men ?”
She turned, and saw Gonzalez then ;
And wonder left her colorless.

XXXIII.

One shrinking glance, unborn of fear,
One hasty movement of her hand,
And then she called in accents bland—
“Come, Oscar, come”—but with a sneer
Gonzalez spoke : “He sleeps to-night ;
The men, fast bound, bewail their plight ;
No one, my lady-love, is near.”

XXXIV.

“Base wretch ! And thus you hope to bend
A soul that loathes thy outcast name ;
And thus you glory in the shame
That none are nigh who help can lend !
This hand, though frail, can wield a dart
To find at least a maiden’s heart,
If baser ones it may not rend.”

XXXV.

“Aminta ! hold !” he wildly spoke ;
“Dark passions cleave my soul in twain ;
Forbear to add the greatest pain,
The words of scorn from one who broke
The check-string of my youthful life ;
For, hadst thou been my wedded wife,
My sins to life had never woke.

XXXVI.

“There is a hell, good Christians say,
Where demons goad the dupes they made,
And dupes their tyrants fierce upbraid :
That hell is mine by night and day ;
The love that lured me to my crime
Mocks at my grief ; no cure has time,
In my abyss there is no ray.

XXXVII.

“And I, mad fool—I love thee still ;
In my dark hell thou art the joy
Once seen, then lost, but ever nigh,
Whose thought my hell with torments fill
In vain I curse thy countless charms ;
For memory my wrath disarms,
And, while I curse, it draws my will.

XXXVIII.

“But come, Aminta, smile on me ;
Forget my past, be my own bride—
Let love the victor be, not pride ;
My deeds of wrong can soil not thee.
Nay, strive not now thy heart to steel ;
In frenzied love to thee I kneel—
Aminta, O Aminta ! see.”

XXXIX.

Just God ! it is a painful sight,
A writhing soul in guilt-born toils,
A fettered slave whom sin despoils
Of all that makes existence bright :
And yet less painful than a soul
Proud, passionless, with self-control,
But cankered by Agnostic blight.

XL.

There stood the fair Agnostic ; cold
As moonbeams on an iceberg's crest,
An outcome of a creed unblest—
Life is to her a trackless wold.
Sin-seared, Gonzalez in his grief
Made Christian, for an instant brief,
Does not from hope his thoughts withhold.

XLI.

Aminta smiled with flashing scorn
To hear Gonzalez pray to God ;
Man was to her an earthen clod,
And sin a name from custom born :
Foul deeds she shunned as outward stains,
But thoughts she never once restrains ;
So sin was of the act but shorn.

XLII.

She haughty turned and moved away,
These mocking words she only said :
“ Gonzalez, when I choose to wed,
To me, not God, my spouse must pray.”
The spell is broke ; Gonzalez rose ;
He fronts her as she lightly goes,
And hoarsely gasps, “ Aminta, stay ! ”

XLIII.

He grasped her with a powerful arm,
A reckless light gleamed in his eye.
“ I know with death I will not die,
And yet I dare—O cursed charm
That weans me from my better mood,
And makes my very mildness rude ;
I dare the ill, but weigh the harm !

XLIV.

“My life is now a moral wreck ;
Its shattered planks your love can bind
And gild the seams where they are joined ;
Can man anew with hope the deck
And guide to safe and honored port
What now of waves is but the sport,
Or drifting at each passion’s beck.”

XLV.

Unconscious, in his frenzied state
Her fragile arm he cruelly pressed ;
The pain she felt no words expressed,
But bowing to her fancied fate,
“Strike, monster, strike ! my dying groan
Shall breathe in every failing tone
The accents of undying hate !”

XLVI.

Young Coroman had silent stood ;
The muttered words reached not his ear ;
He deemed the man a lover dear
Unworthy of a girl so good.
But now these words of bitterness
Showed him the maiden in distress,
And with a bound he cleared the wood.

XLVII.

He drew a poniard from his breast :
“ Hands off ! Thy coward life defend !
’Twere better now to make an end,
And give thee to thy final rest ! ”
Thus Coroman. Gonzalez freed
A dagger from his belt with speed,
And now ’tis who can thrust the best.

XLVIII.

Now foot to foot they press the earth ;
The clashing steel its story tells ;
Like jingling of a carter's bells,
It hath a jocund sound of mirth ;
But fiercer than the prowling ghouls
That haunt the simple carters' souls
Are now the hates that give it birth.

XLIX.

As when beneath proud Ilium's wall
Achilles met the Trojan chief,
And sought revenge for private grief,
And Troy, not Hector, seemed to fall—
Such to Aminta was the fight,
Who, powerless, shuddered at the sight,
But no Minerva can she call.

L.

Ill had it fared with Coroman,
For dark Gonzalez' strokes were true—
Swift to decline, quick to pursue;
But, as they round a circle ran,
Gonzalez broke his trusty blade;
Its point lies glinting on the glade,
Its golden hilt but little can.

LI.

They heard the tramp of armored men:
Gonzalez saw their waving plumes;
Before his mind there darkly looms
A hated picture.—They are ten
Avengers on his track. To wait,
Is but to court an outlaw's fate—
To fly—he leaves Aminta then!

LII.

Yes! he had stood and dared them all
To gaze on her, e'en as he fought;
This taste of love he would have bought
With blood and life, and deemed them small
As price for one short hour of bliss:
But she for whom he'd dare all this
His high resolve turned soon to gall.

LIII.

"Gonzalez, see," she coldly spoke,
"The law hath arms to reach thee yet;
O would we'd never, never met!
For, as around the healthy oak
Uncourted ivy leaves a stain,
So thy mad love, though all in vain,
Will shame a love it never woke."

LIV.

He heard. As one asleep he stood ;

An awful wave surged o'er his soul ;

His cheek grew black, but like a coal

His eye shone 'neath its lowering hood.

Placed in the crucible by Fate,

Love, hope, and pride, distilled in hate ;

With one wild cry he sought the wood.

LV.

Young Coroman with gentle ways

Aminta soothes, and as they walk

Of the past scene they scarce will talk.

To him 'twould seem he craved her praise ;

To her a dread, an unknown fear

Lest he should deem Gonzalez dear,

A lover of her youthful days.

LVI.

Thus had they met. Emotions spring
Full swift from Nature-planted seed;
Youth is a miser in its greed
To garner love; the subtle sting
Close follows on the heels of joy;
In mood 'tis like a maiden coy,
And ever lurks 'neath Cupid's wing.

LVII.

O gentle muse! deign thou to weave
Genetic story of true love.
Is it an ark-emitted dove
That o'er a wasteful world must grieve?
Is there no spot where it may rest?
Bears it no branch of olive blest
To joy the soul at life's quick eve?

LVIII.

Or if it be of mortal mold

How is it born? Whence its king power

Transforming hearts within an hour?

Can it be bought, like gems, for gold?

And why the thorns that hedge it round

That most the truest hearts will wound,

Whose love is oft a poem untold?

LIX.

Thus soft I asked my well loved muse,

Reclining 'neath the dark-green pines

Through which the failing sunlight shines,

Sweet spot to me, a glad recluse.

A zephyr stirred the cone-ribbed boughs,

They murmured low as half-spoke vows,

Then wailed as one who hopeless woos.

LX.

Was this the answer to my cry?

I heard it in the fitful breeze

When cellule cones drop from the trees,
And dying summer seems to sigh :

Love is a breath from paradise,

Free at its birth from pain or vice,

Earth-touched 'twill soon in sadness die.

LXI.

Eternal cycles measure not

Love's awful span of living years,

While stars shall circle in their spheres.

Its youthful face shall know no blot ;

E'en should the stars by stronger will,

Clash in their orbits, even still .

Unaged, Love will guard our lot.

LXII.

Life comes from love and love from life,
A seeming paradox this law ;
Its chain of reason shows no flaw,
The Gordian knot requires no knife,
For God is love and life, or each,
Unbounded essence, as they teach,
A simple act with causes rife.

LXIII.

Walk back the years—He ever is ;
Unfold the laws of cosmic kind,
In vain in them you seek to find
A power or plan that is not his.
The firmest fixed of Nature's laws—
That all effects must have a cause—
Proclaims aloud—He ever is.

LXIV.

God-born, Love fell upon the earth,
Faint image of a brighter ray,
But in our gross and mortal clay
It savors of our carnal birth :
'Tis oft refined concupiscence,
The sport of passion and the sense,
And so of thorns it has no dearth.

LXV.

They truly love who love in God
A fitting soul to be their mate,
Nor blindly think a myth-born fate
Can shape their future by a nod ;
Nor for a throb of love sublime
Mistake the frenzies of a crime ;
Nor think that all must own Love's rod.

LXVI.

No fetters bind the human will;
'Tis Folly's voice and Passion's plea
To say in love we are not free :
A coward age that fain would still
Some outward shame-sense seem to own
Hath feigned this tyrant ; by his throne
They purity and freedom kill.

LXVII.

Ah, Poesy ! oft a traitor made
To thy sublimely noble task,
Tear now aside the curséd mask
'Neath which false love too long hath played ;
For souls will mourn and hearts will break
Oft for a clayey idol's sake
That never worthy act essayed.

LXVIII.

Self is the measure of our age ;
Its science starts and ends with self ;
Art reckons triumph by its pelf,
Nor seeks to live on glory's page ;
Philosophy, are termed the views
That most unbridled lust diffuse
Or 'gainst the Godhead loudest rage.

LXIX.

As lightest dew on fungus seared
The culture of our age is spread
O'er souls to high emotions dead,
Who scout the God their sires revered ;
The risen sun the fungus bares,
We see how changed the look it wears,
How foul when dews have disappeared.

LXX.

Nor wonder then that lives are sad,
That blossoms wither ere their eve,
That passions round us cobwebs weave,
And pleasures cloy once they are had;
Eternal love produced the soul
And gave itself for final goal;
Walk in its light and life is glad.

LXXI.

What thought Aminta as they strayed
With ill-feigned haste to reach her home
But ever found new cause to roam
Or linger where the moonbeams played?
In woman's soul is born the thrill
Of Love, the seed-bud and the will,
In man's 'tis but of this the shade.

LXXII.

There is a law no sage may speak,
A subtle law—soul acts on soul,
Magnetic waves alternate roll
And tell the tale from eye and cheek ;
Philosophers who vaunt that dust
Is source and cause of life and trust
Read by this law are sucklings weak.

LXXIII.

When eye meets eye in speaking glance
The clayey orb is to the thought
That flits between with love waves fraught
Like air to beams that o'er it dance,
The vehicle, but not the cause,
The book, but not the deathless laws
That claim a higher birth than chance.

LXXIV.

The world moves in its God's embrace.
Its smallest atom knows his care ;
The varied beings of earth and air
To souls must yield the highest place ;
For soul to soul, though sundered wide,
A thought can wing—let those deride
Who from the ape man's dawn would trace.

LXXV.

Two perfect looms work in a mill,
The warp and weft in each the same ;
Unmoved alike by praise or blame
They weave with strange mechanic skill ;
Though side by side the threads touch not,
Unknown to each the other's lot ;
For them there is nor good nor ill.

LXXVI.

Thus would our souls unloving weave
A tangled web of joyless life
Were creeds that now in books are rife
Aught but sand ropes the silly reeve;
Devoid of soul, lives' viewless threads
Could mingle not, for knowledge spreads
But from our souls that joy and grieve.

LXXVII.

The fear that daunts a timid mind,
The hate that sears a bitter heart,
The sorrow when from friends we part,
The love that dwells in bosoms kind,
The hope that gilds days yet unborn,
Emotions deep of mocking scorn,
Proclaim a soul no brain cells bind.

LXXVIII.

Aminta feels her bosom swell
With throbs that mock her baseless creed ;
E'en as they rove, a yearning need
Threw round her heart a sadlike spell ;
She felt the soul she oft denied
Alternate thrill to his beside,
And knew the tale they mutual tell.

LXXIX.

She knew the tale, and yet a fear
Half born of hope a shadow throws,
For not from grief come all our woes,
And in her eye there formed a tear.
Young Coroman its welling saw,
For him tears had a meaning awe
As when one comes a graveyard near.

LXXX.

For e'en as from each sodded grave
A wordless voice in monotone
Proclaims in death the seed is sown
Of life to come; so tears that lave
The eyelids of a foe or friend
Wet furrows where emotions blend,
But only blend new born to wave.

LXXXI.

Aminta in the coils of fate—
For thus agnostics term the course
A soul free from resistless force
Walks in its willing love or hate—
Before her saw a dark abyss
Flanked by a grove of perfect bliss,
And Coroman sat by each gate.

LXXXII.

'Tis ever thus ; life's sweetest hour
Is like a broken sunset ray
Athwart the restless wavelets' play
Where light is flecked with shade's dark lower ;
Thus is it well ; else noble aims,
Seduced by life's alluring claims,
Had never woke to lofty power.

LXXXIII.

Thus mercy mingles in our cup
The aloë with the luscious grape ;
The orange blossom and the crape
The sum of countless lives make up ;
With lightsome shade and shadowed light
Our passing years wing on their flight.
We drink our chalice, sup by sup.

LXXXIV.

Say, can Aminta 'neath her heel
Love's glamoured idol sternly crush?
Can she exchange the conscious blush
And 'gainst soft thoughts her bosom steel?
'Twere vain to ask. Has free will then
No resting place in souls of men
That she must to this passion kneel?

LXXXV.

Foul vice, in cultured masquerade,
To brutish level with fine phrase
And prattle of great Nature's ways
Would all that's human fain degrade;
Free will, the soul's undying years,
And God, it terms exploded fears,
And swinelike makes in love the maid.

LXXXVI.

For tune the harp to any key
'Tis still the harp the music makes,
And cold are still the white snowflakes
On sleeping land or tossing sea;
So cloak the pleading as you may,
In garb of science, love, or lay
We're naught but beasts unless we're free.

LXXXVII.

Frail human heart, so much of good,
So much of guilt within thy folds
That pity oft the balance holds,
Nor strikes where justice sternly would;
A noble sense, e'en in thy sin,
Its grossness loathes, and strives to win
Excuse from truths not understood.

LXXXVIII.

And hence the God-born marriage tie,
That loosens but by death its force,
It fain would cut by foul divorce
Its newest lust to sanctify!

And so, as onward we advance,
To wanton in the ball-room dance
Is sinless whims to gratify!

LXXXIX.

The maiden's cheek is trained to blush
But at an overt deed of shame;
What Christian lips should never name
She now may read, nor hotly flush:
Thus runs the code agnostics own,
Thus science speaks from mud-built throne,
And thus to hell they headlong rush.

XC.

But now the castellated hall
Where dwelt her father stern and cold
Aminta neared ; the wasteful wold
Cast round three sides a dreary wall ;
A rock, deep set in ocean's breast,
Was fitting circuit to the rest
Where waves to wood unceasing call.

XCI.

A mother's love Aminta lost
Long years ago ; the godless school
Had been her nurse, her guide, her rule,
What flowers could live beneath its frost ?
Her father, by the catch-cry led,
Like better dupes, high hopes had fed,
But now he sadly counts the cost.

XCII.

Yet was she quite correct in deed,
And, as the world goes, passing pure ;
Vice learned from books she could endure,
For that was sanctioned by her creed ;
But cold, unloving as she grew
Her father mourned, for well he knew
That 'mongst the grain there was a weed.

XCIII.

Aminta faltered sad "Good-by"
As Coroman stood by the door ;
The moonbeams made each object hoar,
But on her cheek they told no lie.
"We'll meet again?" he asking said ;
A faint "Oh, yes," came from the maid,
'Twas like the echo of a sigh.

XCIV.

They met again, and oft they met,
And soon the tale was told in words
Too soft to wake the dreaming birds
Or stir the dew on leaflets wet ;
And bright the summer ebb'd away,
And nightly now upon the bay
They meshes weave in love's silk net.

XCV.

Bright summer days, how swift ye glide
To join the years that Eden knew !
Is it because they were so few
Ye fain would hasten to their side ?
Or are your rays a borrowed beam
From theirs shot down time's fateful stream
To nourish hope, to humble pride ?

XCVI.

Why plume your wings for rapid flight
When lonely chambers of the heart,
That open but by potent art,
Are filled with sweet delusive light?
Does envy prompt the spiteful deed,
Or rather say, does mercy plead
To haste, because you are too bright?

XCVII.

Yet there was one—Aminta's sire—
Who cursed the tardy summer days;
He cared not for our hero's ways,
And bade him quench the new lit fire.
And so each night, beneath the cliff
Young Coroman came in his skiff,
And saw afar his heart's desire.

XCVIII.

But swift or slow, the days will pass,
The longest night will have a morn,
And to each day is duly born
A night from Time's inverted glass.
And so that summer erewhile fled,
The fairest flowers were soonest dead,
Then slowly withered up the grass.

XCIX.

Sweet autumn came—Sun's youngest child,
So bright, so changeful in its mood,
The zephyr and the storm wind rude
Find welcome in its bosom mild.
Like smiles of those who early die,
It brightens as the end draws nigh,
Nor dreads a grave with snow deep piled.

C.

Year's almoner ! the thoughtless crowd
Proclaims thee cheerless, dark, and sad ;
True poets hail thy footsteps glad
And love thee when at rest or loud.
To garner—mission of the good—
Asks means not always understood,
And hence thy mingled sun and cloud.

CI.

Great Nature dies, but not in grief ;
A matchless robe her coffin's pall ;
Around bright leaves in silence fall,
And for a tombstone stands a sheaf ;
Fit emblems these for skeptic eyes,
They tell the dead again will rise ;
Thus Nature tributes to belief.

CII.

One autumn eve, when mid the trees
The wind was heard with fitful moan,
Like him who sobs when all alone,
But hushes when a face he sees,
Her nightly watch Aminta kept ;
'Twould seem as if her lover slept,
Or did he fear the rising breeze?

CIII.

A sadness seemed the night to fill ;
It lurked beside the cushioned chair,
It peopled every foot of air
With phantoms dread, because so still ;
On such a night the senseless herd,
All insect life, the feathered bird,
Prescient seem of coming ill.

CIV.

E'en now Aminta hears afar
The plashing of his well-known oar ;
It sounds not as the night before,
But can such thoughts her pleasure mar?
Strange truth, but yet she inly fears;
Grief reigns, not joy, as quick he nears,
And sad, she notes a falling star.

CV.

Such as when first Eve's virgin eyes
Were opened by the shame of sin
The all consuming grief within
Shut out the charms of paradise ;
Such felt Aminta as she learns
That Fate's rough wheel, as round it turns,
Must bear her love 'neath other skies.

CVI.

“ My dearer self, Aminta fair,
Remorseless laws no pity feel,
Else would I now a suppliant kneel
That they might this sad sundering spare ;
But no ; there is no ray of hope—
’Gainst destiny ’tis vain to cope,
Entombed is joy in black despair.”

CVII.

Thus Coroman, who all too soon
Cant phrase of bastard science spoke ;
Aminta from her anguish woke
To watch him glide where shone the moon ;
Like Eve’s, when closed lost Eden’s gate,
Her smothered sob. “ Ah ! cruel fate ! ”
And then there came a dreamless swoon.

BOOK II.

BOOK II.

I.

Ah ! longing heart, what mean those throbs,
Those boundless yearnings that aspire
To good that e'en may sate desire,
And free thee from thy dower of sobs?
Frail human heart, thy acts so weak
A fallen child thee clear bespeak,
Or one a vengeful spirit robs.

II.

And yet, Capacity immense,
Outstretching far world's bounded ken,
And upward soaring, mocks at men
Whose fixed horizon is their sense ;
Capacity, what shall thee fill ?
Ah ! longing love, what shall thee still ?
Agnostics speak or get ye hence.

III.

Hope, seed-bud in each bosom lives ;
'Twas Nature's hand the furrow made,
And bade its roots our souls pervade,
And Nature now it life dew gives ;
Is Nature mother of a lie ?
Shall she her daughter Hope deny ?
Is bliss a drink from broken sieves ?

IV.

I live—I feel—I know—I love ;
My slightest act laughs at the sham
Of Science guessing whence I am.
Shall Folly then pretertentious shove
True wisdom from its God-built throne,
Seat in its stead a creed unknown,
And snap the chain that's linked above?

V.

I sink into unconscious nought!
I follow in the dreary wake
Of fading sparks that cornstalks make
Whose glow dies quick as passing thought?
I subject of emotions deep,
Of untold powers that calmly sleep,
By hand divine divinely wrought?

VI.

Accursed, and thrice accursed the creed
Of cold materialism born,
Where death of life is not the morn,
But night eternal is our meed.
From me undying thoughts have birth;
Can this be from organic earth
Devoid of life's undying seed?

VII.

Ah! restless soul, wert thou the clay
A purblind science fain would claim
Thy needs, like brutes, would be the same
Like theirs of joy and grief the way;
To-morrow, thought unknown to thee;
The past, a blank from memory free,
Thy life would center in a day.

VIII.

Go, search the hearts of human kind,
With nicest eye their actions scan,
And say doth one, one only man
Blest in to-day thy science find?
Before him stretch in endless view
Unnumbered hours ; the passing few
To these can not his vision blind.

IX.

Add riches to the richest store,
Make fame a captive in his hand,
Give him all power on sea and land,
With countless menials at his door,
Spread feasts as for a Sybarite,
Songs for the ear, charms for the sight,
And still his soul will long for more.

X.

How reads this riddle of our life,
That mortals seek immortal joy,
That pleasures here so quickly cloy,
And hearts are e'en with yearnings rife?
That love's bright morn no midday knows,
And darkness comes ere even's close,
And fondest hopes bear seeds of strife.

XI.

Let fools deride ; Faith's God-girt breast
Their puny shafts can turn aside,
And mock with these their sin-born pride.
Our souls were made for God the Best ;
'Tis he alone can satisfy
Their every want, can still each cry ;
In him alone shall they find rest.

XII.

One ghastly thought will ever mar
The fairest forms of human skill;
One lurking phantom tells of ill,
Though faintly seen as lotioned scar;
There in the background of each smile
The shadow rests, though hid erewhile,
And points to death's unerring star.

XIII.

Can science banish not this ghost?
Has art no power the shade to lay?
Must culture to it tribute pay,
And mingle 'mong the rabble host?
Mock at the mediæval saints
And at the scene their life-work paints,
Yet you, not they, fear death the most.

XIV.

Ah, stern Avenger ! thine the power
To rend the veil of passions born,
To turn to fears the scoffer's scorn,
And show a God with all his dower.
The cold agnostic dreads thine arm,
Oh mighty Death ! woe, fear, alarm,
Are his in thine unsparing hour.

XV.

Pride girded—for his shallow brain
Deems knowledge had when scarce its shade
Flits through where sin a night has made—
He strives to show that faith is vain ;
A thousand fools approval cry,
For dearly sinners love a lie,
And triumph seems to grace his train.

XVI.

On, on, the car its noisome way
Holds like another Juggernaut :
The victims fall with passions fraught,
But others join as mad as they ;
“ Hail mighty Scientist,” they shout ;
Like Jove he nods and struts about,
But shrieks and groans on death’s great day.

XVII.

Aye, such the end of craven guilt ;
Since Cain beheld his angry God
And cowered on the blood-stained sod,
Who in their pride on self had built—
A Julian, Voltaire, or a Paine—
Have ever feared Death’s awful reign,
His sheathless sword without a hilt.

XVIII.

And she, Aminta, hapless maid,
 Embowered by the bud-burst vines,
 Frail as their half-formed leaflets, pines,
Of her own fancies now afraid.
 Vague yearnings for a peace of soul,
 Vague thoughts of life's great after goal
Rise in her heart, but die dismayed.

XIX.

“What can give peace?” she sadly asks;
 “What bring a balm to broken hearts
 From whose wrung fibers ever starts
A phantom that false joy unmasks?
 Is there a morrow for the dead?
 Is there a life for those that bled
And fretted o'er earth's weary tasks?”

XX.

“Oh, dread abyss! oh, viewless naught!
Eternal shadow girds thee round;
Is this the end great spirits found
Who highest words of wisdom taught?
For them no more the throb of sense,
For them no life—a void immense—
Can it be true, this crushing thought?”

XXI.

“Oh love! Oh truth! heroic deeds!
Are ye the acme of deceit?
A lure to hearts that nobly beat,
And long to find eternal meeds?
If death be life's completed page
All vain for acts is other gauge
Than that which springs from our own needs.

XXII.

"'Tis cold this knowledge of our time;
All things must center in myself;
Naught has a worth but that of pelf,
And virtue is the twin of crime;
My selfish good the highest law;
To seek it not the only flaw;
Self is our end and self our prime.

XXIII.

"Why bear the fardels of earth's care,
Unloved, unsought, with sickness spent,
With heart that fancies vain torment,
And cloud each morn with bleak despair?
A tiny draught would end my woe—
False Coroman might feel the blow,
And think of her he once thought fair.

XXIV.

“But yet, if true Mathilda’s creed,
Who dare would face His awful throne
And see a God he would not own,
And hear a fate by him decreed?
A sore dilemma is my lot—
To live unloved, despised, forgot,
Or tread where death perchance may lead.”

XXV.

Thus moaned Aminta ; and her woe
A pall-like cloud on blackest night,
Unlit by ray of Hope’s fair light,
Did round her heart its darkness throw ;
How vain in moments such as these
Are wealth and art and shams to ease
The sorrows that from dead faith flow !

XXVI.

Earth was for her life's chiefest sum,
And she the chiefest thought of life;
She little recked how much of strife
To proud, cold hearts must ever come.
To those who gird with self the earth,
And think for self each flower has birth,
Great Nature is forever dumb.

XXVII.

Who restless seek fresh joys to find,
To drink sweet nectar from each cup,
Who test the flavor of each sup,
Shall be the sport of Fate unkind.
Love duty, ease your neighbor's load,
Learn life is but an episode,
And grateful peace will fill your mind.

XXVIII.

Grief is the offspring of our hearts,
Begotten of a selfish thought;
It springs to life, and bears self-wrought,
A quiver with a thousand darts;
Each poisoned shaft is selfward bent;
Think of yourself, a dart is sent,
And with such thoughts increase the smarts.

XXIX.

As sunbeams through a fissure shine
And light beneath a gloomy cave,
Or like the glint on peaceful wave
While dark the underbearing brine,
So on great souls that look afield,
And self to duty grandly yield
There softly falls a joy divine.

XXX.

How could Aminta grasp a truth
That Faith divine alone can teach?
Could she beyond her false creed reach
And learn what Christians learn in youth,
Then o'er her furrowed soul might fall
In gentle drops, the grand cure-all,
The grace that comes from God's own ruth.

XXXI.

Beside Aminta sat two maids,
Both fair of form, and yet dark night
Less widely differs from the light
Than do those ever-changing shades
That o'er their faces dance and flit;
A lily one, with sunshine lit,
And one a gladiole that fades.

XXXII.

Aminta saw as in a glass

Her image in this latter girl.

Around they spin in error's whirl,
Like broken wheels that jarring pass;
One, mistress, cultured fair æsthete;
One, maid, with novel lore replete—
The souls of both like shriveled grass.

XXXIII.

To her Aminta slowly turned

And spoke with low, pathetic voice:

“Rosina, why do some rejoice,
And why by Fate are others spurned?
What hand of envy from the urn
The Furies in their anger turn
Has drawn my lot by crime unearned?”

XXXIV.

“Canst tell some tale or legend wild
To soothe the anguish of an hour ?
Such words agnostics hold have power
Beyond the Christian’s creed defiled.”
Rosina, with a wistful smile :
“I’ll tell a tale of love the while,
The story of the fire-king’s child.”

Rosina’s Tale.

Where Hecla spurts its flame and smoke,
Where grimy ashes sear the grass,
A rock beneath, the fire-sprite spoke
As gazed she on a magic glass :
“Earth, fire and smoke, snow, frost, and ice,
Then have I only dreamt the scene ;

I laid me down—'tis but a trice,
And must have only dreamt a dream.
And yet my glass was ever near;
In it I thought I saw the change;
Can I recall each pulse of fear
As felt I each emotion strange?
Afar I saw the spot called Earth;
In it no race of mortals dwell,
Yet age by age, as for their birth,
It changed beneath a quickening spell.
My home a planet hung in space;
Smoke, fire and ice and frost, and snow;
No other of my hapless race,
Alone, unloved, with deathless woe
I kept my watch—I, doomed to be
The guardian sprite of burning hills;
And yet it sometimes seemed to me

A kindly death might end my ills.
Nor was I always thus alone ;
Nor was I always thus in tears—
But hark ! 'tis his, his very tone,
Though now unheard for fifty years.
What are the words ? The self-same few
He sadly sang when called away,
To make me feel how well he knew
My love from him could never stray.
How sweet they fall upon the ear !
I'll sing them in this lonely place ;
Perchance he lists and may appear—
Oh, joy to look upon his face !”

SPRITE *sings.*

“ But apart from the fear and the sigh,
Apart from the gleaming, tear-lit eye,

Apart from the half-muttered vows,
There's more that my faith doth arouse
In the lingering look from the soul
Striving to speak unspeakable dole."

.

"Alas! they're echoes from his grave,
Sweetly roused by Love's potent art;
But echoes have no power to save,

Nor balm to ease the bleeding heart.
Ah my true glass, show me again

The scenes and days of long ago;
Their memory will not cause such pain
As that of lonely grief and woe.

I see them now; there stands our home,
The cradle of our race; the mount,
The plain where we did youthful roam;
But not a stream, but not a fount.

Volcanoes rage in endless wrath ;
Our planet trembles in its course ;
The lava chokes each beaten path,
And quakes each heart before such force.
I see them die—my blighted race ;
Entombed, or withered by a blast
Of burning air ; and then the face
I loved ; and I am left the last.
The fires die out ; I wander then
Round craters cold, o'er valleys dark ;
Sameness there is, and night, as when
Goes from the soul of hope each spark.
Here aimless beds whose rocky edge
No sparkling waters ever lave ;
Here banks where neither grass nor sedge
In sportive breezes ever wave.
A dreary waste ; stern piles of rock,

Without a shrub or plant or tree ;
Of all our race the last rude shock
Left none alive but wretched me.
Afar fair earth in beauty smiled ;
I saw, then sank into a swoon,
Its brightness had my soul beguiled—
I came to it from yonder moon.
And now that planet, stern and cold,
Its aspect hides with borrowed light,
And wins the love of young and old
Though o'er it reigns eternal blight.
And earth, so fair when viewed afar,
Is fire and smoke and snow and ice ;
Oh, that I were in yonder star !
Oh that my death were but the price !”
Spoke sadly thus with plaintive tone
The fire-sprite from her recess lone ;

And as she sighed, there smote the air
A voice that blended with despair
Of yearning hope a something mild,
But yet expressed in accents wild.
It seemed to rise the rocks among,
And this the burden of its song—
.

XXXV.

“Rosina, hush!” Aminta spoke ;
“Such saddening strains no longer sing,
Not peace, not rest, these weird words
bring ;
Faint echoes from a heart that broke,
In dreamless sorrow like to mine,
They touch a chord no hand but thine,
False Coroman, had e’er awoke.

XXXVI.

“Ah, why those passions of the soul
That restless seek an unknown good,
That strive for joys not understood
And mock our boasted self-control?
In girlhood days they calmly slept;
My sorrow then but joy that wept,
For both hinged on the self-same pole.

XXXVII.

“Deep in our heart unfelt there lies
Of all our painful thoughts the germ;
When years have brought the given term
It sprouts and bears its fruit of sighs.
Is this a law that helps to solve
The riddles that our lives evolve,
And makes us more than Plato wise?

XXXVIII.

“Is this another name for Fate?

Do lives run in a destined groove,
Stern ruled by laws that naught can move,
And love enforced, and enforced hate?

Why blame I, then, lost Coroman?
He loved for the allotted span,
But from the dream I woke too late.

XXXIX.

“And yet this teaching of our school
Would leave my actions never free,
Would class a crime with purity,
And make us but our passion’s tool:

Nor wrong, nor right could then remain,
No deeds of worth, of sin no stain,
If laws firm fixed emotions rule.

XL.

“Thy creed, Mathilda, Science fears,
Else 'twere a restful, glad belief;
It gives the stricken heart relief
By whispering of eternal years.
But superstition can not fill
A mind that scales the lofty hill
Of Science, though her pay be tears.”

XLI.

As when a basking serpent charms
Gay plumaged bird in Lima's dells,
The victim feels the charmer's spells,
And yields, but still 'mid dire alarms;
E'en so Aminta dreads the lure
Agnostics spread, but insecure,
Yields with a sigh that wrath disarms.

XLII.

Oh, had she felt the joys untold,
The soul rest born of our dear creed,
So apt to meet man's every need,
And loving science new and old !
True science, not a bastard sham,
Its father vice, and pride its dam,
Then had she sought the saving fold.

XLIII.

In it alone is reason free ;
In it alone the arts excel ;
In it, as peaceful sisters, dwell
God's word and high philosophy.
But those who glory in the shame
Of ever-shifting creeds, proclaim
That they have left its slavery !

XLIV.

As when a blinded mob o'erthrew
A ruler gentle, just, and wise,
They shouted : " Freedom is our prize,
Down with the old, long live the new ! "
Soon on their neck the iron heel
Of tyrant feet they helpless feel,
And taste rebellion's fitting due.

XLV.

So wayward is the human heart,
They sing of wrested liberty ;
E'en thus those souls in heresy
Who from God's kingdom stand apart ;
The cowering slaves of unbelief,
They grasp at phantoms for relief,
But hurl at Mother Church a dart.

XLVI.

Vain are their darts. Majestic still,
Like giant rock on Alpine crest,
With faith an armor for her breast,
She stands above all human ill.
She broke the pagan power of yore;
Her robes are dyed with martyr's gore;
She fear agnostics' puny will!

XLVII.

O! Church divine! a virgin fair,
And yet enriched with motherhood,
Like her who 'neath the Holy Rood
Saw die her son without despair;
The ages add but to thy grace;
No spot, no wrinkle on thy face;
The seal of God alone is there.

XLVIII.

Aminta yet may see thy light ;
Her selfish heart may cease to grieve ;
The lessons that thy great saints leave
Can stop our moans, when learned aright.
Peace here to those who conquer self,
Eternal crowns unbought by pelf
To those who triumph in the fight.

XLIX.

Mathilda with deft fingers wove
A mimic frieze of knotted twine ;
Like tracery on an ancient shrine,
Or boughs enlaced in linden grove,
The woven cords took form and grace ;
The fretted work that artists trace
'Gainst this in beauty weighted strove.

L.

Like heart's-ease tipped with morning dew
Her trustful eyes had pleading look ;
A changing light they ever took
From violet to an azure blue ;
But yet their depths were sweetly calm,
Soul-moving as a prophet's psalm,
And like its vision fair and true.

LI.

She mourned Aminta's cultured pride,
And bright Rosina's thoughtless ways ;
She grieved as passed their idle days
That they had known no heavenly guide ;
Their empty souls she longed to fill,
Their aimless yearnings and their will
To God from earth to turn aside.

LII.

To her Aminta weeping yet—

“Mathilda, canst thou naught relate

To ease a heart sore bruised by fate,

Whose sun of life will quickly set?”

With cheering smile Mathilda spoke;

“My tale, I trust, will peace evoke;

I’ll tell what made a monk forget.”

Mathilda’s Tale.

Out from the gate walked a monk in brown,

Out to the woods, away from the town:

Silent he trod, his eyes bent on earth,

His thoughts of heaven and the Saviour’s birth.

Bright shone the sun on leaflet and twig;

Bloomed here the olive, and here the fig;

Peeped through the shrubs a white rose in bloom,
Like hope to man through the riven tomb;
Wild grew the blossoms of flowerets fair,
Rich with their perfume the fragrant air;
Decked in bright robes earth smiled to the
sky,

Azure girt then this smiled in reply.
Ceaseless the hum from insect and bird,
Bleated the lambkin, and lowed the herd;
Life was their boon, no shadow it bore,
Free the pasture—what wanted they more?
Spoke loud of God the fair scene around,
Herbs, fruit, and flowers his praises sound.
God, sang the bird watching its nest;
God, piped the hopper never at rest;
God, breathed the zephyr dying away;
God, spoke the sun from its sevenfold ray.

Such was the day, such all lives will give
When bursts from the heart—"Thank God I
live!"

Out to the woods the monk bent his way ;
Took from his girdle the beads to pray.
Deep in the shade he rested awhile ;
Beamed, like the woods, his face with a smile.
Bright from a rock near his shady seat,
Fell, with the sound of pattering feet,
Down 'mid the moss a silvery stream,
Fair as a wavelet seen in a dream ;
Kissed by its spray, the shy violet smiled ;
Lichens and mosses the eye beguiled.
Far in the dell a shadow was thrown,
Dark as the soul whence hope hath just flown.
High on the hill, through the shimmering leaves,
Seen as a shower, the sunshine cleaves.

Gazed the old monk with a thankful eye.
"Fair is the earth and fair is the sky;
God of the tempest, God of the calm,
What must be heaven when here is such
balm!"

Spoke thus the monk in a prayerful tone;
Died midst the leaves a zephyr's faint moan;
Broke from the throat of an unknown bird
Strains such as never the old monk heard.
Low was the key, and soft was the note,
Like sighs of love that in dream-land float,
Faint grew the thoughts of earthborn care,
Turned were his breathings to silent prayer.
Straight to God's throne his prayer breathings
went,
Straight from God's throne deep heart joys were
sent.

Knit with the song the little bird gave,
Floated on high, like a sun-tipped wave,
Prayer from the monk to the God above;
Sated his soul with the might of love.
How long did he list? he could not tell;
When ended the song he heard a bell.
“Ave Maria” smote on his ear,
But the bell sound woke an unknown fear.
Changed were its tones, or did he but dream?
Had the song made old notes harsher seem?
Rock-born, the rill there babbled along,
Spray kissed the moss the violets among;
Yet there was change; and now there seems
not,
As one may dream of a well-known spot.
Back to his cell the monk hastened now,
Seamed are his cheeks and furrowed his brow;

Trembling his step, and halting his gait.

“Who rings at our door at hour so late?”

Spoke through the wicket a brother old;

“Open! ’tis I just come from the wold.”

Back to the chain the oaken door swung.

“What dost thou want, and why hast thou rung?”

Spoke thus the brother standing within.

“Peace,” said the monk; “knowest me not,
Paulin?”

Each gazed on each with a wondering fear;

Each voice smote strange on the other’s ear.

Well were their words to each other known,

But strange was the key, and strange the tone.

The monk without struck an old-time note;

Rough, though well cut, the syllables float;

The voice within took a softer key,

Less lordly and from a lisp less free.

“ Art thou a friar from some clime unknown?

Whom dost thou seek, and hither how blown?”

Thus spake the porter with nervous dread,

Such as is brought by the unhoused dead.

He from without gave a weary sigh.

“ Brother, I come from the copse, here nigh;

At noon I sat by the rock-born spring,

Erewhile from the grove did sweetly sing—

Angel, or bird, that of heaven spoke,

Hours flew past, then to earth I awoke

As the *Ave* bell, soft through the gloam,

Hymned to the Virgin and called us home.

Methought as I came I saw a change,

And thou, Paulin, hast an accent strange;

And e'en thy face in the coming haze,

Seems as of one unknown to my gaze.”

"I know thee not," spake the monk with-
in,

"None are out; my name is not Paulin."

"Call me the prior, brother, I pray,

What meaneth the riddle he can say."

Slow from the church came the prior old,

Broken and seared, his heart is yet bold.

"Open," he said; "let the weary rest;

To-night let him be our honored guest."

As the oak door swung with a grating sound

The brother without sank on the ground.

With loving care they make him a bed,

And the prior prayed as the hours sped.

With rosy dawn the guest found his speech,

And e'en as he spoke he strove to reach

From its rusty hook the card that bore

The brothers' names in a written score.

And he trembling learned that years gone by
He strayed from home to the woodland
nigh ;

“ And thrice on each day ” — so reads the
scroll—

“ For long weary months the bell did toll ;
And we mourned for him as for the dead,
Though we know not how his spirit fled.”
With a wistful gaze he scanned the room,
And notes that now there is less of gloom ;
Old objects seem to lurk in the shade,
And strange ones bask in a light new made.
“ The same, but changed ; what meaneth the
spell ?

Oh ! brother speak, and the mystery tell.
Methought at noon of the day just passed,
I sat me down by the streamlet fast,

And heard for a time such notes of song
As to heaven, not earth, must sure belong;
And yet as I look an unknown change
With well - known sights mingles new and
strange;

And the name list tells that years three
score

Have passed since I left this convent door.”
The prior gazed, and his gaze flashed truth,
Then he slowly said: “In my early youth
From our gates went forth a monk quite
old

Who took his way to yon silent wold;
And now as I gaze methinks I see
Come back to life his features in thee;
Thou art surely he! Fra Bruno, speak.”
“’Tis I, ’tis I,” came in accents weak.

“Ah ! brother,” spoke the mild old prior,
“Thrice happy thou to have heard the choir
That echoes strains from the courts above,
And in endless keys proclaim God’s love.
Thus in deathless joy years linger not,
For pain, time’s measure, is there forgot.
The three score years that thou wast away,
Passed all in bliss, seemed but as a day ;
And thus may we learn what heaven can
give

Since its echoes so charm those that live.”
Fra Bruno heard, but his prisoned soul
Yearned now for life’s eternal goal ;
Its foretaste of joy disgust had bred
For pleasures that die ere we are dead.
The monks came round the old brother’s couch
That they might, too, for this wonder vouch.

They heard with deep awe Fra Bruno's tale,
And silent they vowed, with faces pale,
To suffer in life, for God, all loss,
To bravely bear the heaviest cross,
That joy eternal might be their meed,
Where tears flow not, and hearts never bleed;
Where time has ceased its deceitful play,
And endless years are but as a day.

LIII.

Mathilda ceased. A softened smile
Lit up Aminta's brooding face.
As sunbeams shadows playful chase
Till all are bathed in light the while,
So on her brow the night of shade
That fondled sorrow there had made
Grew bright as eye unknown to guile.

LIV.

“ Oh, would that it were not a tale !
So beautiful and quaint it seems,
Like thoughts that float in childhood's dreams
Ere life has entered Care's dark vale.
Oh, were such songsters in our bowers,
I'd dream away the tardy hours,
In rapture drowning all my wail.”

LV.

Thus spoke Aminta, and she sighed
As one who fain in doubt believes;
A strange new joy e'en then relieves
Her bruise worn hopes, and softens pride ;
On night's chill air day's after balm
Wafts to the soul a lesser calm
Than o'er her senses seems to glide.

LVI.

The touching tale like glistening dew
Fell on a heart not dead but seared;
Her angel, softly whispering, neared
And o'er her soul a grace ray threw;
Of Hope the never-dying seeds
That germ e'en in a math of weeds,
Warmed by that ray to flowers grew.

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LVII.

The summer days on golden wing
Through Time's unmeasured cycle sped;
Like humming birds by instinct led,
They follow in the wake of spring;
Calm autumn, girt with russet sheaves,
With chaplet wove from love-touched leaves,
Of answered promise came the king.

LVIII.

How sweetly comes great Nature's death !
Her gorgeous tints speak not of woe ;
She sinks and dies without a throe,
And blesses with her latest breath ;
Hope shines from out her garnered store,
And tells that as in days of yore,
When Abel dies there comes a Seth.

LIX.

To God we gladly leave death's hour,
His every counsel is the best ;
Yet might we make this one request,
To fade with grass and leaf and flower ;
On some October day to die
When sun-decked earth smiles to the sky,
And then be laid in sunlit bower.

LX.

No gloomy cypress round our grave ;
But when our obscure race is run
We'd sleep where brightest shines the sun,
And dewes the pansies soonest lave ;
A cross—the pledge of life-sought prize—
These simple words—He shall arise—
This, this the boon I fain would crave.

LXI.

Aminta, on her weary bed,
In painless dying wore away ;
A hectic flush like sunset ray
Her face distinguished from the dead ;
Like beauty of an autumn eve
When parting beams their shadows leave
The grace of yore wreathed round her head.

LXII.

The quickened breath, the throbbing beat
Of timid pulse—the nerveless hand
Now cold as death's relentless wand,
Now burning with a febrile heat—
All these proclaim that veiled disease
That fills life's cup with deadly lees,
Yet makes the mixture passing sweet.

LXIII.

Aminta spoke with docile tone :

“How blind, how blind my useless years!
I sowed in pride, I reaped in tears,
And now my life is all but flown.
I worshiped at the shrine of Art
With cultured mind and pagan heart,
The God of beauty left unknown !

LXIV.

“I dreamed of Arnold and his school,
I read his every rhythmic page;
I conned the works of Concord’s sage,
The man true wisdom calls a fool;
Ah me! the lost, lost years of life!
My lowest servant’s Christian wife
Than they can give a wiser rule.

LXV.

“False sentiment, unmeaning phrase
Of light and beauty, good and true,
A creed that held to match a hue
Was more than highest moral praise;
These, these the trifles—Oh, how vain!
We vaunted as man’s noblest gain,
And aimless groped in truth’s by-ways.

LXVI.

“Mathilda, will my God forget—
That God you taught my soul to know,
And joyed a heart where reigned but woe—
The vice, the whims I now regret?
In mercy’s sheath will justice hide
The sword that smote Balthasar’s pride,
And lead me where no sin-griefs fret?”

LXVII.

A shadow crossed Aminta’s face ;
Sin’s shadow stood beside her bed ;
But soon the evil spirit fled
As sweet Mathilda took her place—
An angel, yes, in human guise,
Who sought Aminta’s soul for prize—
And spoke this wonder tale of grace :

LXVIII.

“Old time, impatient of command,
A son had left his father's home;
His wealth ill-spent, was forced to roam
And herd swine in a foreign land;
The husks the herd beneath them tread
He gladly ate for daily bread,
And trembled 'neath his master's hand.

LXIX.

“‘This, then, the freedom I have sought?
For this I cast aside the yoke
Of Father's home—for this I broke
His loving heart, and even thought
My wretched deed a deed to boast!
Ah, father, when I suffer most
To thee my heart is nearer brought.’

LXX.

“Keen Sorrow’s rod with pelting blows
The sin-wrought crust broke from his soul ;
Love now his passions can control,
His chastened heart with hope now glows.
Afflictions are not sent in vain ;
We turn to God in greatest pain,
From woe our best amendment flows.

LXXI.

“And thus the erst unfilial son
His father’s slighted love bewails,
It, it alone when all else fails
Will pardon grant for worst ill done ;
And thus with tender thoughts of home
He ceased to fear, he ceased to gloam,
And speaking thus his tears fast run :

LXXII.

“ ‘How many round my father’s hearth,
Though servants, are abundant fed ?
They never know the want of bread,
And I here perish from its dearth !
To father, then, I’ll humble go,
My guilt proclaim, then, bowing low,
Renounce the privilege of my birth.’

LXXIII.

“ Afar his son the father spied ;
On wings of mercy forth he came ;
Joy swallowed up all cause of blame,
And falling on his neck, he cried :
‘ Before thee, father,’ spake the boy,
‘ And heaven, I sinned ; in thy employ
As servant let me now be tried.’

LXXIV.

“ ‘Haste, haste!’ the father spoke mid tears;
‘The finest robe forth quickly bring;
Upon his finger place a ring;
Shoes for his feet; the fatted steers
Quick kill; prepare the merry feast
For this my son, from death released,
Returns, though lost for many years.’ ”

LXXV.

Aminta heard the biblic tale;
She felt the might of love divine;
Soul bending by the Godhead’s shrine,
To joy was changed her former wail.
Oh, carnal minds there is a cause,
Unfettered source of Nature’s laws,
That acts beyond great Nature’s pale!

LXXVI.

Life's strandless thread of gossamer
Attrite by every pulse and breath,
Is snapped, at length, by viewless death,
Relentless foe that hovers near;
But dauntless sounds this innate cry :
"Not all of me shall ever die,
Unhoused, my soul but quits this sphere."

LXXVII.

A shadow fell o'er outward sense,
A veil was lifted from her soul;
Dark now the traveled road ; the goal
Grows brighter as she journeys hence.
Now moves a door on noiseless hinge,
Time dies upon hereafter's fringe—
The outward shadow grows more dense.

LXXVIII.

Oh moment awful 'bove all thought
Ere gives the heart its latest beat!
Oh, life, stern season passing fleet,
How vain the joys you anxious sought!
Flesh shackled yet, but on the brink
Of spirit life, she seems to sink
A speck 'mid light with mystery fraught.

BOOK III.



BOOK III.

'Twas night. Deep o'er the City of the Popes
Hung the somniferous pall; the bihorned moon
Now gleamed athwart the azure, stilly vault,
While spires and domes and arches softly
glowed

In checkered silvery light; now hid behind
A fleecy bank of clouds, shut out her charms
As modest virgin veiled. Heaven's lesser fires,
When dimmed the glory of their beauteous
queen,

The sleeping city palely, dimly wrapped
In evanescent hues. In rippling wakes

That playful kissed the shore flowed rapid on
The old uxorious stream; here loath to quit
Its wedded bride, serpentine bent its way
In dallying currents past the jutting base
Of castle wall; here with dashing roar it struck
The prow-like point of that once sacred isle
Whither in serpent form Æsculapius crept,
When borne to stay the ills of plague-bound
Rome.

I.

Came Coroman to papal Rome,
Fair city on its waning hills;
For age by age each valley fills
With ruined walls and rain-borne loam.
Time's signet here attests the truth,
Rome has in age perennial youth—
Of weary hearts the very home.

II.

Much had he strayed, and suffered more,
Since lorn Aminta from his boat
His words rhapsodic keenly smote;
Like waves that never reach a shore,
Soul yearnings stirred within his breast;
No beach for them whereon to rest,
They surge and sigh forevermore.

III.

With Kant he sought all truth to scan;
"Pure Reason's Critique" was his lamp;
He thought cognitions owed their stamp
To nature of the soul in man—
So sayeth Kant, and Kant is king
Of owlets who on feeble wing
Have swirled around outside truth's span.

IV.

Objective truth for them is not ;
Sensation tells what to it seems,
All vain are its delusive dreams,
Deception is our joyless lot :
A mind that differed in its mold
From ours would other concepts hold ;
What seems a mound would be a dot.

V.

Thus Coroman, like spider keen,
Found warp and woof whereof to weave
Ideal cobwebs ; some may grieve
That these of truth have but the sheen ;
Weak error 'tis of weakest minds
That self to truth objective blinds,
And makes of Science doubt the Queen.

VI.

With Hegel, Fichte, and all that crew
Next sought he truth that should be clear ;
But German lore, like German beer,
Is stomached only by the few ;
It bears the froth of pompous phrase,
No ray of reason clews its ways,
To mind and sense a dreary view.

VII.

Soul sickened of his weary search,
Ere yet to Rome his steps he turned
He roved where fire old time had burned
And lava now the scene besmirch ;
“How like my state !” he might have sighed,
“My soul laid waste by skeptic pride
And mad revolt against the Church.

VIII.

“I burn, but not with healthy fire ;
My crucible holds naught but dross,
Faith perished in a self-wrought loss,
My faulty heart nursed false desire ;
Gold there had been in tiny threads
Like gossamer the sunlight spreads
On peaceful fields when winds expire.

IX.

“Ah! truth betrayed, I mourn in vain :
The broken hour-glass holds no sand,
Flowers bloom not on a blighted strand,
And years once lost come not again.
We reck not days in riant youth,
For fleeting joys we barter truth,
Age has for heritage but pain.”

X.

Yon mount for cycles silent lay,
Its crater fair in verdant pride,
The grape vines grew adown its side,
And o'er its crags did wild goats play;
Forgot the violence old time heard
When substretched Typhon writhing stirred
In vain attempt to reach the day.

XI.

Pompeii saw its bursting flame
With wonder not unshorn of fear;
A boiling stream comes rushing near,
And ashes all the outlets claim.
The ashy rain unceasing falls,
The air is rent with fiery balls—
Pompeii now is but a name.

XII.

Gone in a day the work of years !
Its founts and temples, vice and crime
Deep buried 'neath the lava grime,
With molten stones for pleading tears.
Thus passion burning in the soul,
Unchecked by reason's firm control,
All garnered virtue ruthless sears.

XIII.

Lay hid to man for ages long
The streets we thoughtful tread to day ;
Here in this track the wheels' rude play
These ruts had worn ; yon curbstone strong
Was hollow ground by passing feet ;
By this dried font did lovers meet,
And there loud laughed the idle throng.

XIV.

How like to day the ages fled !

The restless hum of life the same ;

A thirst for gold, a dream of fame,

A chase for joy where false lights led,

Short rapture carking cares surround,

Sin-mantled bliss delusive found,

Then life's short sunbeam deathward sped.

XV.

Stern Duty with her brow unbent

Hid roses on her thorny road ;

The thoughtless only saw the goad,

Nor loved what seemed a long sad Lent ;

But heroes are a deathless line,

They tend stern duty's rimous vine

That yields the juice of pure content.

XVI.

What gives thy smile, Parthenope ?

Not far thy smitten sister lies ;

In vain the lava seaward hies,

It may not reach and wither thee.

Afar Misenum guards thy bay,

Æolides sleeps 'neath its clay,

And Capri looms above the sea.

XVII.

For idle pleasure thou wert born ;

Thy founders sprung from Grecian race ;

In thee the stage held honored place ;

Hence Nero, fearing critic's scorn,

Judged thee the spot of all most meet

To tread the boards with buskined feet

And dance to sound of brazen horn.

XVIII.

Not far there stands a vacant tomb ;
Erstwhile a noble tenant slept
Its walls within ; Fame vigil kept
And shed a halo round its gloom ;
Thy dust, oh Virgil, none may see,
Thy peerless epic speaks of thee ;
The world is now thy lecture room.

XIX.

Beside this vault stood Coroman ;
An opal glow flushed in the west ;
Dark sapphire lit each wavelet's crest,
Or playful in its ripples ran ;
In purple light fantastic crags,
Deep clefted where the soft earth sags,
Throw round the bay a gorgeous span.

XX.

With vale and hillock interwove
The mountains die into a plain ;
Here peasants garner sear-leaved grain,
God's own unfailing treasure trove ;
A zigzag path that vine trails hedge
Leads to the sleeping water's edge,
O'er rocks that erst volcanoes clove.

XXI.

Famed Posilippo's tunnel gaped
Away beneath the rifled vault.
Grim Time, was thine the ghoulish fault
To wreck the tomb friend hands had shaped ?
Unharm'd by thee the tunneled way
An egress gives, since Greeks held sway,
To spangled lords and friars' caped.

XXII.

On Coroman the beauty palled
Of sea and earth and life-filled air;
It seemed an echo of despair
To his chafed soul from all things called.
He longed to love, he burned to know,
But like a crocus 'neath the snow
From warmth and light his soul was walled.

XXIII.

What built that wall? Ah! speak it loud.
The pride that never bent the knee,
That mocked the Christian's prayer to Thee
O God, who dost Thy face enshroud;
Thy footprints here the wise behold;
The sainted pray lest they grow cold,
And only laugh fools weak as proud.

XXIV.

Old in his youth ! an awful curse !
Avenger meet of unbelief ;
This canker of a subtle grief
That countless hearts 'neath laughter nurse.
Æons, seed-germs, environment—
This jargon bears no sweet content ;
For them what is is always worse.

XXV.

Man thirsts to know creation's cause ;
Phenomena sate not his mind ;
Their hidden source he yearns to find,
No fact concrete can make search pause ;
In reason's flight he bursts the gyves
That helpless fetter dumb brute lives,
And from the seen the unseen draws.

XXVI.

And yet, oh contradiction strange,
The Maker of vast Nature's plan,
Who should subjection claim from man,
For painted moths some hearts exchange;
But soon, by sad mischance, bereft
Of pleasures they had hoped enfeoffed
In doubting darkness they shall range.

XXVII.

Doubt blights the heart, unnerves the arm,
With furrows seams a youthful face,
Of joy and hope destroys all trace,
And breeds an undefined alarm.
The aged young are social bores ;
In vain for them earth spreads her stores ;
They gape, they yawn, they see no charm.

XXVIII.

Slow Coroman descends the hill ;
The vacant tomb no message brings
Of future hope ; he moody flings,
Where in a bower the throstles trill,
A shriveled clod ; the joyous note
His thankless ear reproachful smote,
And hence his wish their voice to still.

XXIX.

These are the days of passage swift ;
We rival pigeons in their flight ;
The tortured engine in its might
Seems guideless as a ship adrift.
As Coroman from Naples sped
A gloomy cloud hung overhead—
Of leaden dun without a rift.

XXX.

Once had he seen its analogue,
On distant Metiz' winding shore
When from Aminta's heart he tore
Love's hope by his harsh epilogue.
The rushing train skirts round the base
Of lava hills ; their onward pace
No brooding thoughts the wheels can clog.

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XXXI.

'Tis night in Rome ; our hero stands
Where grandly Trevi's fountain plays ;
The water in the soft moon rays,
Gleams like a stretch of silvery sands :
A calm is in the upper air,
The nether world like Eve is fair
When fresh from God's creating hands.

XXXII.

Twin footsteps tread the shadowed street—
For lofty walls the moonbeams hide—
Our hero sees two figures glide
Where light and shadow seem to meet:
In silent mood they pass him by;
His soul is moved, he knows not why,
And fain he would those girl-forms greet.

XXXIII.

Philosophy's unfathomed well
Holds secrets hid from mortal ken;
There is a law the wisest men
Have often felt but may not tell;
'Tis as the soul a magnet hung
'Twixt this and worlds unseen, and swung
Here to attract and there repel.

XXXIV.

The conscious self its kingship feels
O'er all the laws that matter own ;
A monarch, seated on its throne,
Beyond this body's marge it deals
In subtle acts on cognate souls ;
More reaching than the heart's systoles,
Its will no cell-girt captive kneels.

XXXV.

And thus our hero seems to know
The unknown forms that move away ;
He heeds no more the fountain's play,
But follows with a heart aglow—
Through winding streets, up sloping hill,
Where Phidias' statues towering still
Link old to new in storied show.

XXXVI.

Historic palace of the Popes—

Defiled though now thy Conclave Hall—

Thou standest yet, oh Quirinal,

Firm planted on those classic slopes !

Our hero notes thy massive walls

Lit by a ray that softly falls,

But only heeds his unshaped hopes.

XXXVII.

Not far a church—a quaint old pile,

With seams deep cut around its base,

Like wrinkles on an honored face,

An added beauty gave the while—

Ope'd on the street ; clear lights within

Shone like a grace dispelling sin

O'er kneelers in the nave and aisle.

XXXVIII.

The muffled figures sought the door ;
Low bent they in adoring mood ;
Aside our hero wondering stood.
To see their heads bend to the floor ;
The hush, the calm, that filled the air
Woke in his heart the thought of prayer,
And long forgotten peace of yore.

XXXIX.

Far up the nave a ring of light
Gleamed round a burnished star of gold ;
What pure white gem doth that star hold
Which seems of all to be most bright ?
A beam of more than earthly hue
Shoots from the gem ; it passes through
The darkness of his soul's dead night.

XL.

“Oh saving Host,” the chanters sing,
“That open’st wide the heavenly gates,
Around us press war’s venom’d hates,
Give strength to us, and help quick bring!
To God Triune eternal praise
Who life will give with endless days
When to our home our flight we wing.”

XLI.

Strange fell the words on Coroman ;
In startled fear he turned his eyes
Aloft and saw with rapt surprise,
Where from the choir a grating ran,
Mathilda, in a nun-like dress,
Her face a pictured loveliness,
As one who leads the angels’ van.

XLII.

Mathilda? Yes, the gentle maid
Had sought the cloister's blessed rest;
Her choice, like Mary's, was the best,
As e'en our Lord himself had said,
By night and day the saving Host
Is there enthroned, their loving boast
Perpetual praise to Christ is paid.

XLIII.

Mathilda, who can paint thy joy?
What tongue can tell thy holy bliss?
Love's sweetest pay is love. Ah! this
Thy love is free of earth's alloy.
Grant love a need of human hearts,
Yet human love with poisoned darts
Oft seeks a victim or a toy.

XLIV.

What sees she mid the tapers' glow?
Half lifted from the floor she seems
And forward drawn toward the beams.
Distended eyes, and murmuring low
Sweet words of love and trustfulness—
No sign of pain, nor of distress,
And yet great tears her cheeks down flow.

XLV.

Our hero gazed, and gazing saw
Each token of Mathilda's love.
"Is there" he mused, "a power above
That human hearts can sweetly draw?
Can love be false in such a guise?"
He quaked, for from Mathilda's eyes
In burning light he read God's law.

XLVI.

As well the noonday sun deny
As truth intuitive; the mind
To its own self can not be blind;
The living feeling subject *I*
With inner consciousness is fraught;
The truth perceived may be unsought,
The actual known but not its why.

XLVII.

Around, as in an endless lake,
A light immutable is spread,
Reflected shadows there are bred
Of verities; the Prophet spake—
“In thy light, Lord, the light we’ll see,”
From this each mind, in its degree,
Doth certitude and knowledge take.

XLVIII.

Mathilda, in a trance of prayer,
Soul wrapped in God, heart brimmed with love,
Knows bliss, all human bliss above,
Free from the pangs earth's joys must bear.
Our hero's mind, in truth's clear light,
Mathilda's soul-bliss reads aright,
The cause a God, he knows is there.

XLIX.

He knows, yet bows not to belief,
As one who roams uncanny vales
Made weird by oft-repeated tales,
The vale traversed he feels relief ;
Indignant at the fear he felt
He hides the pistol in his belt,
Nor owns he quaked an instant brief.

L.

What profit in this senseless lie?

The silly pride of weakling minds

A bliss in self-deception finds. .

Small brains are fitted to deny ;

Keen intellect, a power of will,

Fears not assent ; our hero still

Gropes willful on. Faith is too high.

LI.

The music ceased ; a prayerful few

Still linger in adoring mood ;

A shaven monk, in cowl and hood,

Who once a world of sorrow knew,

Bent to the floor his furrowed brow ;

A peace well won shone o'er him now,

Then silent from the church withdrew.

LII.

What saw our hero in his gait?

Why turn on him inquiring gaze?

He could not tell; strange are our ways,

Strange meetings on our footsteps wait.

And now the two who led him here

Arise, and moving pass him near—

What phantom this? or is it fate?

LIII.

The downcast eye, the winsome face,

Hid not of life that written page

Which told of love's once blighted gage;

He saw, enshrined in newborn grace,

Aminta fondly loved of yore;

A great wave rushed from the before

And broke upon his heart's void space.

LIV.

The wasted years, his mind's false trend,
The love he reckless cast away,
The wild unrest since that dim day
Which gave his summer dream an end,
Aminta's faint and wailful cry,
To life's romance a sad good-by,
O'er his stilled heart their shadows send.

LV.

Our life is measured not by years ;
Some live an age within a score ;
The vital acts of mind are more
Than length of days ; 'tis thought that rears
And measure gives of life's grand arch ;
'Mong reason-dowered they furthest march
Who coined most thoughts ; not whom age sears.

LVI.

And Coroman in one swift glance
The story read of many days;
He lived five years in that short gaze
And woke as from a hideous trance.
What soul nepenthe had she found,
So calm, so bright, so care unbound,
While he sad buffets 'gainst blind chance.

LVII.

What snatched Aminta from Death's hand,
Gave to her pulse life's nectar red,
Brought bloom that erst her cheeks had fled,
And health to seek this classic land?
Perchance Mathilda knew the cause—
The sublimating of life's laws
By Faith, the Christian's magic wand.

LVIII.

“A miracle!” the skeptic sneers.

“Are then the ages backward turned?

Have all we taught been thus unlearned?

Does Faith still live despite our jeers?”

Cease jabbering, ye agnostic crew,

Learn now a truth ye never knew,

God acts through the eternal years.

LIX.

In ordered sequence from his will

Creation's laws their birth first took;

His thoughts beyond their blind force look

And plan their work with matchless skill;

Invoked like artist deft, a key

At will is touched; the harmony

No discord knows; laws there are still.

LX.

Aminta quit the holy place,
Rosina silent at her side—
Gone was her air of giddy pride—
To sweet Mathilda bore some trace.
Our hero moved as in a dream.
Without, where fell a soft moonbeam,
He saw a monk's unhooded face—

LXI.

The same who late the church had left ;
A story written on his cheek—
Fierce passions held subdued and meek,
Of flame, not sense, they were bereft ;
Peace on his brow her signet set,
Hope in his eye with patience met,
In Faith's strong shield there was no cleft.

LXII.

Him where he stood our hero sought ;
No purpose fixed his footsteps guide,
He only hoped an aching void
Relief might find in exchanged thought ;
The monk a moment bent his eyes
On Coroman with veiled surprise,
Then o'er his head the cowl he brought.

LXIII.

“What meant the lights, the flowers, the song,
The incense floating through the air,
The hymn intoned, the muttered prayer,
And heads low bowed of all the throng ?
Doth the Unknown such homage heed ?
Can man make known to him his need ?
Is virtue blest and curst the wrong ?”

LXIV.

Thus Coroman. The monk unbent
His rigid brow. "Behold," he spake,
"Yon moon as in a sapphire lake
And stars that glow as diamonds rent,
And countless thousands dimly gray—
Fair pavement of the milky way—
That seem in yon faint sky-path blent

LXV.

"To-morrow morn gaze on the sun,
A sea of fire by cyclones swept;
To naked eye its form is kept,
Yet o'er its face what changes run!
Eruptions awful in their might
Spurt vapor fire in headlong flight,
But die ere yet the day is done.

LXVI.

“Our planet in its orbit whirls;
One season but another breeds;
The harvest whitens from dead seeds,
Death in its folds life loving furls.
Creation’s tongue proclaims to man,
Above, around, law, order, plan,
Of them each rippling brooklet purls,

LXVII.

“Who gave the law? the plan who wrought?
Of order who the artist skilled?
What but a mind all knowledge filled
From chaos law and order brought?
First cause of all, first motor He;
Seen in his works—we bend the knee,
And find the peace your heart vain sought.

LXVIII.

“Our God is known through reason’s light ;
Dependent causes prove a first ;
Long though the chain, as spoken erst,
The last link hangs on God’s own might.
In fine gradations, from the ‘clod
We rise to man, the work of God,
With soul and sense and freedom dight.”

LXIX.

Thus spake the monk ; our hero sighed
The weary sigh a thirsty soul
Search-baffled gives when dark the goal,
Or met a stumbling-block to pride.
“The same old tale—effects and cause !
Grant matter with its complex laws,
No God is then !” our hero cried.

LXX.

“Grant matter—yes, but from a power,
Existing of its nature’s force,
That marked for stars their spheroid course,
And set for all of death the hour.
‘I am who am’ defines his state,
Before him falls the idol Fate—
He cares for man, and for each flower.

LXXI.

“Pierce with thy mind creation’s veil;
Burst fleshy gyves that bind the soul;
Force is unseen, yet its control
Is of the strong as of the frail;
A Force that thinks, a Force that plans
By him is felt who thoughtful scans
The earth asleep ’neath moonbeams pale.”

LXXII.

Thus spake the monk, and turned away.

Our hero thoughtful sought his home;

Fair in the moonlight seemed old Rome

Still as the glades where dryads play;

Mathilda's face, so pure, so calm,

Before him rose. Knew she a balm

To make life worth the price we pay?

.

LXXIII.

The restless days went cycling round;

Gift-laden moments hurried by;

Few grasped the gifts—the moments fly—

Lost graces die without a sound;

Earth moans in travail; monotones

Of saddest grief haunt all its zones

When hands at eve are empty found.

LXXIV.

One summer eve our hero strayed
 'Neath shattered arches, crumbling walls
 Of Colosseum's winding halls,
Where now a vagrant sunbeam played.
 Within the circle, near the cross—
 Glad emblem of our gain and loss—
Two maidens knelt and fervent prayed.

LXXV.

He knew that form; could he forget
 The one true thought of all his years?
 Wild heart-beats born of unshed tears
Like moaning waves spoke of regret.
 He knew the story of this place
 Where martyred thousands won the race,
But with their blood the ground did wet.

LXXVI.

Fools were they, then, or heroes? Who
Their gory death for firm held creed
Would rob of glory's highest meed,
Or scoff that they to death were true?
Yet were they fools if life's last page
Were closed alike for brute and sage
When death had all relentless slew.

LXXVII.

We prize the true; its mien we know;
We love it with the fair and good;
Had men this thought but understood
Truth as a cause 'twould clearly show;
What then that universal truth
Felt in old age as in our youth
But God whose wonders round us grow?

LXXVIII.

For him the martyrs tortures bore ;
The rack and dungeon, fire, and beasts
With whetted taste for human feasts,
No terror brought to minds that soar
Beyond to-day, and through the veil
Of fleshy weft catch glimpses pale,
By faith, of lights on heaven's shore.

LXXIX.

In mind our hero sees the tiers
Of human forms, that rose around,
Fierce glaring on the battle ground
Where Christian maidens, void of fears,
The lion and the panther dared ;
The brutes oft-times their meekness shared ;
The mob to wonder turns from jeers.

LXXX.

He heard of Agnes—noble maid,
No sunbeam bright or pure as she ;
A child, with woman's majesty,
Or angel as a girl arrayed ;
Fire burns her not ; the brothel's taint
Is blotted out by this sweet saint
Who angel-veiled within it prayed.

LXXXI.

Man's hand the deed of murder did ;
Beneath the axe her twice-crowned head,
With lilies pure and palm blood red,
Fell to the earth ; each beauteous lid
In death still modest, o'er her eyes
Soft closed ; the headless body lies
In seemly form her foes amid.

LXXXII.

Can this sweet child be dead in truth?

Do souls so pure no future own?

Are they at hazard hither blown

To die forever in their youth?

Sweet Agnes! child of all my dreams,

E'en Coroman thy presence seems

To feel, as I have felt in sooth.

LXXXIII.

The evening shadows grew apace;

Like spirit-breathings came the breeze;

Blood all around our hero sees—

Blood pleading for our fallen race;

Fair Agnes floats in upper air;

He sees, he cries, "O God, but spare

My soul!" then falls upon his face.

LXXXIV.

The shadows deepen round the cross,
But in her soul Aminta feels
The joy, the hope its light reveals,
And notes how gain is bought by loss;
Her one romance of earthly love
Sad ended, yes ; but from above
Fell o'er her grief faith's glittering floss.

LXXXV.

Nor killed by this affection deep,
Nay rather widened Love's vast scope ;
Down in her heart there lives a hope,
And pure emotions vigils keep.
She rises now ; the stars are out,
Their opal beams that sport about
Reveal, she thinks, a man asleep.

LXXXVI.

He rose as came the maidens near ;
Aminta saw in outline pale
Our hero's face ; she drew her veil
And shook as with a sudden fear ;
Her heart sees further than her eyes,
It can his presence recognize,
It can his heart's pulsations hear.

LXXXVII,

'Tis he, her idol once. Ah say,
Ye hearts that love have proved, shall she
Hide in her virgin modesty
This knowledge of her soul ? Shall they
Life's sweetest chapter now foreswear ?
Alone, unloved, with fardeled care
Companionless go on their way ?

LXXXVIII.

Aminta slowly moved along

Where ruined arches cast their shade

Black as the grief his words once made ;

Not now forgotten was this wrong ;

Love's wounds by love alone are healed ;

'Gainst him her heart must yet be steeled,

But gentle thoughts are growing strong.

LXXXIX.

Next morn without an abbey gate

Stood Coroman ; changed was his look

And gone his pride ; a little book

He held. Again can this be fate,

Or ways of God ? Who meets him now ?

Who is this monk with care-wrought brow,

Yet with an air of peace bought late ?

XC.

Our hero starts ; the monk looks grave,
Then smiling speaks in friendly tone.
“ ’Twould seem that each to each is known,
So needless questions we can waive;
Within our Prior will hear your quest ;
Perchance you seek, like Dante, rest,
The boon which burdened spirits crave.”

XCI.

“ I come,” our hero calmly spake,
“ With docile heart God’s truth to learn ;
Last eve, despite my purpose stern,
Before his light my soul did quake.
My pride, my doubt, my skeptic lore
Fell vanquished, broken—these no more
My soul’s great thirst for truth can slake.”

XCII.

Gay now is the scene on the old Roman road,
The same that the Sabines breathing vengeance
trode

When back to the heights of the Palatine hill
Fled Romulus and men, their brides shrieking
still.

Out from the gate of the Nomentana Way,
Its beauty within, stands a church old and
gray ;

The floor on a level with a fair saint's tomb,
And yet though thus sunken 'tis devoid of
gloom ;

A shrine since the days of Diocletian's rule,
The fane of sweet Agnes, the pride of Christ's
school.

XCIII.

Maiden of Rome so fearless in youth,
Noble by birth, more noble by truth,
Dowered with wealth and beauty of face,
More peerless still by thy virgin grace,
Deep in thine eyes men oft caught a gleam
Such as from heaven half opened might
stream.

Walking on earth, but living with God,
A lengthened span in brief space was trod ;
To a heart like thine, sealed with the Cross,
All earthly love could seem but as dross.
Fire could not burn a body so pure,
A soul so chaste no tempter could lure,
Man in his freedom alone could kill ;
Asleep in death thy virtues speak still.

XCIV.

A discalced monk with shaven crown
Half covered by a cowl of serge—
A man whose years on forty verge,
His brow a chart where grief has strown
In curves and seams dark reefs of woe,
Yet o'er these play a softened glow
As from a light that falleth down—

XCV.

Moves with the crowd ; and yonder, too,
Our hero comes ; dear saint, thy day
Brings to thy tomb all Rome to pray.
And fair Aminta, sweet and true,
Her eyes more restful than of yore,
Seeks with the throng the open door
And passes from our hero's view.

XCVI.

Within the precincts of that fane
A hush as at creation's dawn
Unbroken reigns; the prelate's lawn
And drover's cloak with dust and stain,
The beggar's rags, the lady's robe,
All meet and touch ; pride feels no probe
When faith shows class distinctions vain.

XCVII.

Oh hearts that chafe life's fragile thread
In ceaseless yearnings for sweet rest,
Oh! souls that stray in aimless quest
Of joy that may with passions wed,
Oh minds that hope from earthly stream
To quaff the truth, outgrow your dream ;
The peace of knowledge Faith hath spread.

XCVIII.

So felt Aminta as she prayed ;
A widened range of truth she viewed,
And in its light, though many hued,
Faith's lessons seem more full displayed.
So thought our hero kneeling here ;
His wasted years, alas ! were near ;
He wept ; but joy all anguish stayed.

XCIX.

So knew the monk with seaméd face ;
In youth the light of truth was his ;
He knew God's Church forever is,
Yet broke her laws for objects base.
Gonzalez he ; repentant now,
Peace in his heart, and on his brow
The signet of recovered grace.

. C.

Yet skeptics still will taunting yell,

“What then is truth?” as Pilate erst,

Nor wait, like him, for answer durst,

Lest it should show their purpose fell.

Dark is their dawn and black their night ;

One thing they dread—Faith’s teaching light,

The Faith that preaches heaven and hell.

CI.

Sweet muse that tuned Cecilia’s lyre—

Born on the morn of Pentecost

Of light supernal—men have lost

The sense for thoughts that breathe thy fire ;

To thee, perchance, some day I’ll turn

Our hero’s after fate to learn,

Nor wilt thou scorn my fond desire.



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